

# RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF OTHERS

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

In this week's parsha of Yisro, Moshe's father in law, Yisro, comes out to the midbar (wilderness) to join Bnei Yisroel (the children of Israel). He brought with him the two sons of Moshe: "Asher shaim ha'echod Gershom (18:3)" - the name of one was Gershom - because I have been a stranger (ger) in a strange land. "V'shaim ha'echod Eliezer (18:4)" - and the name of (the other) one was Eliezer - because the G-d of my father (E-li) helped (ezer) me and saved me from the sword of Paroah.

The Chofetz Chaim asks on this two questions.

1. The miracle of his being saved from the sword of Paroah is what led to Moshe fleeing to Midyan and being a stranger there. Why was the first son (Gershom) named after the second event (being a stranger) and the second son (Eliezer) named after the first event (being saved)?
2. We can understand naming a son Eliezer memorializing the event of Hashem saving him. Whenever Moshe would mention or hear that name he would recall and focus on the miracle that Hashem had wrought for him. However, what was the significance of naming a son Gershom - I have been a stranger in a strange land. What did Moshe hope to focus on by using that name? What was the significance of being a stranger in a strange land?

The Chofetz Chaim explains that at the time that Moshe came to Midyan, Yisro had not yet purified his actions. Moshe was afraid that he'd be influenced by his environment. He would lose his focus. He would forget that he was sent to this world for a reason. He named his first son Gershom - I have been a stranger in a strange land. My place is with Hashem in the world to come - in the world of truth! That is my home - my true existence. In this world I am but a stranger in a strange land. I was sent for a relatively brief stint to this world where Hashem hides Himself, in order to connect to Him through mitzvos (commandments) and ma'asim tovim (good deeds). I must remember my true place, my true home. All of our difficulties in making the correct life choices and all of our complaints about our lot and our lives, stem from an over emphasis on our 'stopover' here in olam hazeh (this world). I once heard a mashal (parable) that we can be compared to a person who is planning to move to Eretz Yisroel and will stop over in France for a few hours on the way. In preparation for his trip he spends months studying the new language he'll be needing to use... French... A clear over emphasis on a stopover.

With this, both questions have been answered. The incident of being a stranger in a strange land actually happened first - at birth. That is the most crucial concept that one can keep their mind focused on throughout life. This is temporary. I will return home and I must have what to show for

my journey. He named his first son Gershom. I have been a stranger. Only much later was Moshe's life miraculously saved. He therefore named his second son Eliezer, memorializing that second event.

I recall watching the winner of some sort of game show. He was entitled to spend a limited amount of time in a department store, with all that he would stuff into shopping carts being his to keep. **He moved!!!** He didn't relax over a coffee, he didn't get a little bit of shut-eye when he felt tired, he didn't even take out a few minutes for a smoke. He moved. He kept focused on the fact that he was a stranger in a strange situation for a limited amount of time.

The story is told that in Radin, the Chofetz Chaim's town, a number of people were ridiculing the town simpleton. One was mirthfully telling the others that this fellow had travelled all the way to Aisheshuk (a larger city approximately twenty miles away) and had only brought back a little bit of snuff! The Chofetz Chaim approached the speaker and gently pointed out to him that his neshama (soul) had traveled a much further distance than from Radin to Aisheshuk. And unless he'll learn to be more careful not to ridicule others, he won't even return with snuff!

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Our parsha also contains the A'seres Ha'dibros - the Ten Commandments. As Hashem told Moshe, the reason that he was being sent to Paroah and we were being taken out of Mitzraim was in order that we'd stand by the foot of Har Sinai (Mount Sinai) and hear His words. It was a three day trip from Mitzraim to Har Sinai. We went through a fifty day process in order to spiritually prepare ourselves for this incredible happening. The final three days were days of heightened holiness as we drew ever so close to the moment. Finally, there was absolute silence in the universe. Hashem, for the first and last time in history, was going to speak to the entire nation. Drum roll please... What did He say? "Lo sirtzoch (20-13)" - Thou shalt not murder! Huh? Are you serious? Is that what we came here for? Two hundred and ten years of slavery... for that?! You've got to be kidding! We knew that! Everyone knows that! We want our money back!

Rav Isaac Sher explains that a later passuk is the key to understanding this command. "When you are constructing an altar (-that which lengthens the life of a person, and you will need the proper sized stones-) no metal implements may be used (20:42)". Not only can't a sword or a knife be used - no metal can be used. Metal is used to form weaponry. It is tainted with 'lo sirtzoch' - it can't be used on the altar. We are commanded to have no taints of sirtzoch.

We've mentioned before that, according to the outlook of the Torah, 'whitening the face' of a person, embarrassing someone, is tantamount to murder. If I'm concerned about another's feelings I can't insult him. Once I can humiliate him, once I don't recognize his worth, I can even come to murder. A metal tool... An embarrassing line... Let's understand this Torah view of murder.

The first five commandments apply to the relationship between man and G-d and the second five commandments apply to the relationship between man and man. The Kli Yakar explains that these

groups align with one another. The first commandment aligns with the sixth, the second with the seventh, and so on. The first commandment, "Anochi Hashem Elokecha (20:2)" - I am Hashem your G-d - aligns with "Lo sirtzoch" - thou shalt not murder.

"If one spills a person's blood, then his blood must be spilt because in the 'tzelem Elokim' - in the form of Elokim - man was made (Breishis 9:6)." The Mishna in Avos (3:14) teaches that Hashem showed us a special love by informing us that we were created in this 'tzelem Elokim'. When did this occur? When the heavens resonated with the words "Lo sirtzoch!" The value of a human being! A walking 'embodiment' of the Creator Himself! Anochi Hashem! Lo sirtzoch!

This, Rav Sher writes, must guide us in our dealings with ourselves, with others and with Hashem. Hillel took leave from his students explaining that he had to go perform a mitzvah. Their curiosity aroused, they followed him and watched him enter a bath house. Upon leaving the bath house he explained this mitzvah to his students. A statue of the king is constantly cleaned and shined. By doing so they honor their king. We who were created in the 'tzelem Elokim' have an even greater obligation to clean and shine this form. To keep and present ourselves properly. Lo sirtzoch! Don't sell yourself short! Recognize who you are.

When we deal with others we must be cognizant of who we are dealing with. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 58B) states that if one slaps the face of a Yisroel it's like slapping the face of the Shechinah (Divine Presence). The medrash warns us against rationalizing that if you're in an embarrassing situation you can bring others down with you. Know who you are humiliating! In the 'tzelem Elokim' man was made! Lo sirtzoch! Don't step on other's toes! Recognize the value of others.

If we were formed in the 'tzelem Elokim' then we must realize our capacity to be like Him. As He is compassionate, so too we must be compassionate. Our very selves and our actions must reflect this capacity. Lo sirtzoch! Don't murder that essential part of you! Recognize what you can become.

It applies to every moment of our days, to every facet of our lives... lo sirtzoch.

Have a great Shabbos and please... lo sirtzoch.

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